



## Reflection by Rev'd Anne Burden

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity  
Mark 7:24-End  
8<sup>th</sup> September 2024

It's not all that long ago in the history of the Church - only a couple of generations - that rich families had particular seats which they occupied when they came to Church. They paid a rent for a pew - the best and most comfortable one, of course - and only they could sit in it. If the family was absent for any reason, the pew was empty.

Another story about seats in Church which I heard in Brixham - was that before All Saints was built and St Mary's was the only parish church in Brixham - the folk from Lower Brixham had to come in through the side door and sit in the gallery because they smelled of fish. I'm not sure whether the people of Higher Brixham (Cow Town) smelled any better, but some of them were considerably richer!! The gallery has long gone, and I was never aware of any smell of fish - but occasionally a little tension between Fish Town and Cow Town still rises up.

Most of the time we can be amused by stories like these - and sometimes we are shocked, because society has changed, and as a church we have moved on. We work hard to make visitors welcome, and remind ourselves that this is God's Church, not ours. I'm put in mind of a fairly new hymn which has become popular in recent years ..... "all are welcome in this place". We're not perfect, of course - and sometimes people get grumpy if someone is occupying their favourite seat - or if we're singing the 'wrong' hymns or even worse the 'wrong' tune - or if things in the service are a bit different from what we expect - or if people don't behave quite how we think they should. We're human and we're still learning - but I hope that we're coming to realise that Church is not a place to display our wealth, or intelligence, or goodness. God knows us as we really are, and he loves us just the same. He wants us to gather together to receive his gift of love and healing - and to celebrate this with joy so that others can experience it too. We can do much as a community of faith to help one another move forward with God. And we do this best not just by speaking the words of our faith, but in acts of service.

This is at the heart of our readings today - and they're worth looking at again with that thought particularly in mind.

(Isaiah 35, 4-7; James 2, 1-10; Mark 7, 24-37) Isaiah talks of God's salvation, particularly to the weak and vulnerable. James is encouraging inclusion and generosity. As God gives this to all people, then so also should we. It's important that we should 'walk the walk' as well as - at the appropriate time - 'talk the talk'. We read in the New Testament passage "What good is it if you say that you have faith itself, but do not have works?" And the Gospel reading from Mark is two accounts of Jesus's healing care for those who would have been called outsiders (the Gentiles) and those pushed to the margins of society (the disabled and the vulnerable). We hear that even Jesus had to learn to include a wider group of people in his remit - that his ministry was for all, not just for the Jews.

So let's think about how we can show God's love in acts of service, not just in words - in Church and in our every day lives. This may mainly be in welcome and hospitality - but most importantly needs to be in allowing God's love to become so embedded in us, that it spills out to those we meet. Our God-given task is to serve the people of Ipplepen with joy as we give thanks to our loving heavenly father.